

ETERNAL PROGRESSION

DISCUSSION 4

UNIFORM SYSTEM FOR TEACHING THE GOSPEL



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INSTRUCTIONS FOR THIS DISCUSSION

Planning for the Discussion

Prepare to teach this discussion by reviewing what took place during your previous visits with the investigators. Plan how you can build upon positive experiences, and anticipate questions and concerns. Specifically, plan (a) what you will do to prepare these investigators to feel the Spirit, (b) when to invite them to make commitments, and (c) how you will follow up to help them keep their commitments.

If the investigators have not yet committed themselves to be baptized or have not yet attended Church meetings, these commitments must be among your major objectives for this discussion. Identify anything that might be holding the investigators back. Make plans for helping them overcome any obstacles.

Review the main principles of this discussion. Then plan how you might present the discussion to build upon experiences you have had with the investigators and meet their needs and interests.

Doctrinal Overview

Our spirits are eternal. They existed before this life and will exist afterward. We lived with our Heavenly Father before this mortal life. He presented to us a plan by which we could become more like him. Knowledge of this plan—the plan of salvation—enables us to understand three basic questions about our existence: Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? The main principles of this discussion are—

1. Before this mortal life we lived with our Father in Heaven.
2. The purpose of this mortal life is for us to prepare to become more like our Heavenly Father and return to him.
3. When we die, our spirits go to the spirit world.
4. The gospel is taught to the spirits in the spirit world, and the necessary ordinances are performed for them in temples.
5. The family can be an eternal unit.
6. The law of chastity teaches us how to govern the sacred power of procreation.
7. The Word of Wisdom is a divine law of health.

Commitments

During this discussion you need to help the investigators feel the presence of the Holy Spirit. This will prepare them to make the commitments that lead to conversion and baptism. During this discussion the investigators should commit themselves to—

- Live the law of chastity.
- Live the Word of Wisdom.

In addition, you should reinforce their commitment to be baptized. Invite them to commit themselves to take part in the fifth discussion, to attend Church meetings, to read further in the Book of Mormon, and to continue to pray about what they are learning. (The following reading assignment is suggested: Alma 11-13, 34; Helaman 14.)

CREATE A LEARNING ATMOSPHERE

DISCUSSION

Establish a Reverent Atmosphere and Continue to Build Relationships of Trust

Review

TEACHING HELPS

Set a reverent and relaxed teaching atmosphere. Strengthen the relationship of trust between you and the investigators.

Invite the family head to ask someone to pray. If the investigators have not yet prayed themselves, encourage the family head to offer the prayer. As appropriate, use the "Instruction on Prayer" in the instruction booklet.

Review the following things with the investigators. Use the study guide for the third discussion in reviewing the Book of Mormon readings, the previous discussion, and the commitments.

Book of Mormon. Review what the investigators have read in the Book of Mormon. Answer any questions they have about what they have read. Find out—

- Which passages impressed them the most.
- What questions they have.
- How they feel about what they have read.

Previous Discussion. Review briefly the principles discussed in the third discussion. Discuss with the investigators any questions they have, and help them resolve any concerns.

Previous Commitments and Spiritual Experiences. As directed by the Spirit, review with the investigators their progress in keeping their commitments. Review their preparation to be baptized on (date). Discuss any moments when they have felt the influence of the Spirit since they began learning about the Church. Find out—

- What interested the investigators most as they attended Church on Sunday.
- How they feel about the Church and their associations with Church members.
- How they have felt as they have read in the Book of Mormon and the study guides.
- How they have felt as they have prayed about the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith, and the other things you have taught them.
- Whether they feel they have received an answer to their prayers. How has the answer come?

DISCUSSION

Introduce This Discussion

TEACHING HELPS

- How they have felt as they have thought and prayed about being baptized.

Remind the investigators that you have often referred to the plan our Heavenly Father has for us. Explain that this time you would like to discuss in greater detail three main phases of that plan. This discussion should help them better understand their part in this plan. Find out whether the investigators have ever wondered about questions like the following: Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going after this life?

PRINCIPLE 1 OUR PREMORTAL EXISTENCE

DISCUSSION

We Lived before Our Mortal Birth

We lived before we were born. We do not remember our premortal life. But our Heavenly Father has revealed important truths to help us understand his plan for us.

We Are Children of God

We are literally children of our Heavenly Father. We lived with him as spirits before we were born on this earth. Each of us was a unique individual. Our spirit bodies were created in the image of our Heavenly Father.

We Were Unlike God

But we were unlike our Heavenly Father in some ways. For example, he had progressed far beyond us spiritually. We did not have a physical body, as he does.

Our Father Prepared a Plan

Because he loved us so much, our Father in Heaven wanted us to become like him. To make this possible, he prepared a plan that would allow us to come to earth. [Read and discuss Abraham 3:22-25.] We accepted the plan of our Father and rejoiced in the blessings it would offer to us.

TEACHING HELPS

Testify: Express your feelings about—

- Your understanding that God is literally your Father.
- The way your knowledge of your premortal existence affects your life here in mortality.

SCRIPTURAL RESOURCES

Alma 13:1-4 (The Lord called and prepared his servants from the foundation of the world.)

Jeremiah 1:5 ("Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; . . . and I ordained thee a prophet.")

Acts 17:29 (We are the offspring of God.)

D&C 138:55-56 (Many "received their first lessons in the world of spirits and were prepared to come forth" to labor in the vineyard.)

Topical Guide: Man, a Spirit Child of Heavenly Father; Man, Antemortal Existence of; Man, Potential to Become Like Heavenly Father

EXAMPLES

PRINCIPLE 2 MORTAL LIFE ON EARTH

DISCUSSION

This Life Has a Purpose

Our life on this earth has a purpose. It is to provide opportunities for us to work toward becoming like our Heavenly Father and to prepare to return to him.

We Each Receive a Physical Body

When we are born into this life, each of us receives a physical body. These earthly bodies are mortal and imperfect. Receiving a physical, mortal body is a step to obtaining a glorified, immortal body like our Father has.

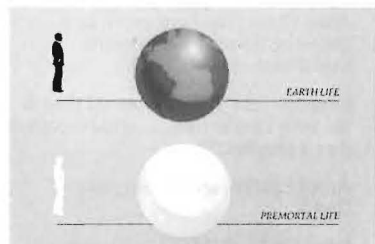
We Are Free to Make Choices

In addition, we are free to choose between good and evil. We are responsible for our choices. As we come to know good from evil and choose the good, we become more like our Father in Heaven.

Growth Depends on Choices

Because we have no memory of our premortal life, our choices must be based on faith. Our condition in the existence after this mortal life will depend on our choices during this life. [Read and discuss Alma 12:24.] By learning to control our physical bodies and act in godlike ways, we become more like our Heavenly Father.

TEACHING HELPS



Testify: Express your feelings about—

- The divine nature of our Father in Heaven.

Find Out—

- Whether the investigators understand the purposes of our mortal life.
- How they feel about the idea that this life is a time to prepare to return to God.
- How they feel about the principle that we grow and develop by being tested and being required to act by faith.
- Whether they have noticed this process in their own lives or in the lives of those around them.

DISCUSSION

TEACHING HELPS

Testify: Express your feelings about—

- The importance of using our mortal lives to prepare for eternal life with our Heavenly Father.

SCRIPTURAL RESOURCES

2 Nephi 2:21 (“The days of the children of men were prolonged . . . that they might repent while in the flesh; wherefore, their state became a state of probation.”)

Alma 34:31-35 (“This life is the time for men to prepare to meet God . . . Do not procrastinate the day of your repentance . . . That same spirit will have power to possess your body in that eternal world.”)

Alma 42:4 (This life is “a probationary time, a time to repent and serve God.”)

Mormon 9:27 (“Come unto the Lord with all your heart, and work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”)

Philippians 2:12 (“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”)

Topical Guide: Probation, Probationary; Test, Try, Prove

EXAMPLES

To show why we needed to leave the presence of our Father to be tested:

When a baby is born, his mother and father carry him everywhere because he cannot walk. One day he takes his first step. In the days that follow he falls many times. The parents hold his hand and help him avoid hurting himself. But they realize that falling is part of learning to walk. Patiently they let the baby learn. Like these parents, God sends us to earth so that by faith and experience we can grow stronger.

As we grow up, we live in a home with our parents. They teach us and provide for our needs. They help us grow. But a time comes when we must leave home, provide for our own needs, and make our own choices and decisions. This is what happened in our premortal life when we lived with our Heavenly Father. He taught us many things. But the time came when we needed to leave the presence of our Heavenly Father and come to earth to learn by our earthly experiences.

PRINCIPLE 3 LIFE AFTER DEATH

DISCUSSION

Death Is Part of the Plan of Our Father

Because our physical bodies are mortal, each of us will die. But physical death is part of the plan of happiness our Father prepared for us. Through death and resurrection, our imperfect, mortal bodies become perfect and immortal.

Our Spirits Go to the Spirit World

As we explained before, at death our spirits leave our physical bodies. Our spirits are still alive, but they go to a place we call the spirit world.

We Will Be Resurrected and Judged

In the resurrection, our spirits are reunited with our bodies in an immortal condition. We will be judged by the Lord according to our faithfulness in following the course he has laid out for us.

We Can Live in Celestial Glory

If we have followed that course, we will return to our Father to dwell with him in celestial glory. In the New Testament this glory is compared to the glory of the sun. Those who inherit this glory will know a fullness of joy. They will have become like their Heavenly Father.

There Are Lesser Degrees of Glory

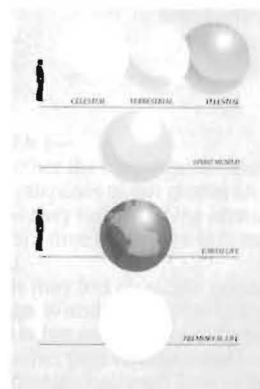
Some people will not have been faithful in following the commandments of God. They will not have exercised faith in Christ, repented of their sins, obeyed his commandments, and received the

TEACHING HELPS

Scripture: Alma 40:11 (At death the spirit departs the mortal body.)

Find Out—

- Whether the investigators understand what happens to our spirits when we die.
- Whether they believe that when we are resurrected, our spirits will be reunited with our bodies in a glorified, immortal state.



DISCUSSION

necessary ordinances. They will not have qualified for a fullness of glory under the plan of our Father. They will still receive a degree of glory, but theirs will be a lesser degree.

Paul Talked of These Degrees of Glory

The apostle Paul compares the celestial glory to the glory of the sun. He compares the other degrees of glory to the moon and the stars. [Read and discuss 1 Corinthians 15:40-42.]

TEACHING HELPS

Find Out—

- Whether the investigators understand that people will receive differing degrees of glory and why our rewards will differ.
- How they feel about this knowledge.

Testify: Express your feelings about—

- Your assurance that we will live after death.
- The importance of preparing now for our eternal state after this life.

SCRIPTURAL RESOURCES

EXAMPLES

1 Nephi 15:33-36 (They shall “stand before God, to be judged of their works.”)

2 Nephi 9:6 (Death comes to man to fulfill the merciful plan of the Creator.)

2 Nephi 9:14; Mosiah 2:38 (“We shall have a perfect knowledge of all our guilt.”)

Alma 12:12-15, 27-28 (Our words, works, and thoughts will condemn us. We will acknowledge that the Lord’s judgments are just.)

Alma 40:12-13 (Between death and the resurrection, the righteous are in a state of peace, and the wicked are in a state of misery.)

Alma 41:3-15 (In the resurrection, every person receives according to his righteousness or wickedness.)

John 5:25-29 (The Savior will judge the dead, and they will be resurrected to life or damnation.)

D&C 76 (Joseph Smith saw a vision of the degrees of glory.)

Topical Guide: Celestial Glory; Jesus Christ, Judge; Judgment; Resurrection; Spirit World

PRINCIPLE 4 WORK FOR THE DEAD

DISCUSSION

Many Die without the Gospel

Many people have wondered what happens to the millions of people who never heard of Jesus Christ or had the opportunity to be baptized. Would God be just if he condemned them?

The Gospel Is Taught in the Spirit World

The Lord has revealed that those who do not hear the gospel in this life will be taught the gospel in the spirit world. [Read and discuss 1 Peter 3:18-19 and 4:6.] Every child of our Heavenly Father will have an opportunity to accept or reject the gospel so that we can all be judged fairly.

We Can Perform Baptisms for the Dead

Those who accept the gospel in the spirit world will have an opportunity to receive baptism. God has provided a way for members of his Church here on earth to perform baptisms for those who have died.

Baptisms Are Performed in Holy Temples

Baptisms for the dead are performed in holy temples. These special buildings are used to perform sacred ordinances for both the living and the dead. This great work for the dead shows the justice, mercy, and love that God has for each of his children.

TEACHING HELPS

Find Out—

- Whether the investigators have ever wondered how those who never heard of Christ can accept him and be baptized.

Find Out—

- Whether this knowledge about the work for the dead helps the investigators appreciate the love and justice of our Heavenly Father.

DISCUSSION

TEACHING HELPS

Testify: Express your feelings about—

- Your assurance that each of the children of our Heavenly Father will receive the opportunity to accept or reject the gospel.
- The blessings that come from helping the dead receive salvation.



SCRIPTURAL RESOURCES

Malachi 4:5-6 (Elijah “shall turn the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.” Compare D&C 2.)

1 Corinthians 15:29-30 (“Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead?”)

D&C 2 (“He shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers.”)

D&C 128 (Joseph Smith explains the doctrine of baptism for the dead.)

D&C 137 (Joseph Smith sees a vision of the celestial kingdom and learns about salvation for the dead.)

D&C 138 (Joseph F. Smith sees a vision of the redemption of the dead.)

Topical Guide: Salvation for the Dead

EXAMPLES

To show the justice of the living performing ordinances for the dead:

Suppose you knew a man who was honest and fair in his dealings. He was devoted to his wife and was good to his children. If this man died without hearing the gospel, he could hear it in the spirit world. Then faithful members of the Church on earth could be baptized for him. In this way God allows all of his children to have the same opportunities before being judged.

PRINCIPLE 5 THE ETERNAL FAMILY

DISCUSSION

We Have the Power of Procreation

During mortality, our bodies have the power to create children. This power of procreation is a divine gift. It allows us to share in the creation of life and to lead our children according to the principles of the gospel. In this way we work toward becoming like our Father in Heaven.

The Creative Power Is Sacred

God has commanded his children to hold this creative power sacred within family relationships. The love that exists between husband and wife and between parents and children is the source of some of our greatest joys in life.

Families Need Not End at Death

Family relationships do not need to end at death. Through the Prophet Joseph Smith, God has restored the knowledge that couples can be married for eternity in sacred ceremonies performed in temples. These ceremonies are performed by the sealing power of the priesthood. Couples receive the promise that if they remain worthy, their family relationships will endure forever, not just until death. This is one of the greatest blessings promised to the righteous.

TEACHING HELPS

Find Out—

- Whether the investigators understand that the power of procreation and their family relationships are sacred.
- How they feel about the knowledge that their family relationships can last not just until death parts them, but into eternity.

Testify: Express your feelings about—

- The joy you have known in your own family.
- Your faith that you can be with your family after this life.

SCRIPTURAL RESOURCES

1 Corinthians 11:11 (“Neither is the man without the woman, neither is the woman without the man, in the Lord.”)

D&C 130:2 (“That same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there.”)

D&C 131:2 (In order to obtain the highest degree of celestial glory, we must enter into the new and everlasting covenant of marriage.)

D&C 132 (Joseph Smith explains the new and everlasting covenant, including the eternal nature of the marriage covenant.)

Topical Guide: Family, Eternal; Marriage, Celestial

EXAMPLES

To show the importance of being a good parent:

When I was young, I learned a song that expresses the belief that each person on earth is a child of God. It reminds parents that they have a sacred responsibility to teach their children the commandments of God and to obey these commandments. [Quote or sing the first verse from “I Am a Child of God.”]

I am a child of God, And he has sent me here,
Has given me an earthly home With parents kind and dear.

Lead me, guide me, walk beside me,
Help me find the way.
Teach me all that I must do To live with him someday.

To show the joy of an eternal family:

This is a picture of my family back home. I have learned to appreciate them even more since leaving home to come on my mission and serve the Lord. If I thought I would never be with them again, I would be very sad. But I have faith that through the gospel of Christ, we can be together even after death. You too can be with your beautiful family forever. Isn't this a wonderful blessing from God?

PRINCIPLE 6 CHASTITY

DISCUSSION

Procreation Is Sacred

We just mentioned the sacred power of procreation and the importance of the family in the plan God has for us. The privilege of joining with God in creating life is an essential part of the plan of salvation. This creative power is sacred.

God Gives Laws to Govern This Power

Therefore, God has given us laws to govern and control this power. He has also given penalties for misusing it.

The Law of Chastity

He set the standard when he commanded, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." [Read and discuss D&C 42:22-25.] The law of chastity given by the Lord is that we are to have no sexual relations with anyone except our husband or wife. The Lord also taught us that we must avoid impure thoughts as well as impure actions. We must keep our thoughts clean and be modest in our dress, speech, and actions. The procreative power must be held sacred, and so should our bodies.

Commitment Invitation

Will you live (or continue to live) the law of chastity in your actions, your thoughts, and your speech?

TEACHING HELPS

Caution: Chastity is a sensitive topic. Be careful to teach it with discretion and consideration for the feelings of others.

"THOU SHALT NOT
COMMIT ADULTERY."
Exodus 20:14

Find Out—

- Whether the investigators feel that the power to create life is sacred.
- Whether they understand why God sets laws to govern and control this power.
- Whether they understand that the Lord's law of chastity means we have no sexual relations with anyone except our husband or wife.
- How they feel about this law.

Testify: Express your feelings about—

- The sacredness of the power to create life.
- The spiritual blessings that come from keeping our thoughts pure.

Note: Many people, without knowing the gospel, have done unwise things.

DISCUSSION

TEACHING HELPS

Some questions may arise concerning past sins. If so, explain to the investigators that they should not confess their sins to you. They may confess such sins in general terms when they are interviewed for baptism. Assure them that they can obtain forgiveness through sincere repentance and baptism. Encourage them to prepare for baptism by living the law of chastity from this point on.

SCRIPTURAL RESOURCES

EXAMPLES

Mosiah 13:22; Exodus 20:14 ("Thou shalt not commit adultery.")

Alma 12:14 (We will be judged according to our actions, words, and thoughts.)

Alma 39:5 (Corianton's sin with the harlot Isabel was "most abominable above all sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost.")

3 Nephi 12:27-30 ("Whosoever looketh on a woman, to lust after her, hath committed adultery already in his heart.")

Romans 1:26-32 (Men and women changed "the natural use into that which is against nature.")

Ephesians 5:3-5 ("No whoremonger, nor unclean person, . . . hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.")

D&C 59:6 ("Thou shalt not . . . commit adultery, . . . nor do anything like unto it.")

D&C 63:16 ("He that looketh on a woman to lust after her . . . shall not have the Spirit.")

Topical Guide: Adulterer, Adultery; Chastity, Chaste; Homosexuality

PRINCIPLE 7 THE WORD OF WISDOM

DISCUSSION

Our Bodies and the Freedom to Choose Are Gifts

During this discussion we have emphasized precious gifts that we have in this life: our physical bodies and our freedom to choose. We have also discussed how the way we use these gifts determines our blessings in this life and in the life to come. The Lord has given us commandments, such as the law of chastity, to help us understand how to use these gifts.

We Should Avoid Harmful Substances

Among his commandments is a law of health known as the Word of Wisdom. This law teaches us not to take alcohol, tobacco, coffee, tea, and harmful drugs into our bodies. These things damage our physical bodies and harm our spirits.

We Should Use Wholesome Foods Thankfully

The Word of Wisdom also teaches that fruits, vegetables, grains, and other wholesome foods are good for our bodies. We should use them with wisdom and thanksgiving.

The Lord Promises Health

[Read and discuss D&C 89:18-21.] The Lord promises those who obey this law that they will be more healthy both physically and spiritually. He also promises wisdom, strength, and increased happiness to those who discipline themselves in this way.

TEACHING HELPS

WORD OF WISDOM

Abstain from—

Alcohol	Tea
Tobacco	Harmful drugs
Coffee	

Find Out—

- Whether the investigators understand the counsel given in the Word of Wisdom.
- How they feel about that counsel.

DISCUSSION

The Lord Promises Us His Spirit

Perhaps most important, the Lord promises that this law can help us be worthy to receive the guidance of the Holy Ghost. Through the Holy Ghost we can know that the Book of Mormon is true and that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God.

Commitment Invitation

Will you live the Word of Wisdom, beginning right now—including the commandment not to take tobacco, alcohol, coffee, or tea into your body?

TEACHING HELPS

- Whether they feel it would be important for them to enjoy the blessings promised in the Word of Wisdom.
- Whether they use any of the substances the Lord counsels us to avoid in the Word of Wisdom.

Testify: Express your feelings about—

- The blessings that you have enjoyed from living the Word of Wisdom.
- Your gratitude for the Lord's law of good health.

Additional Preparation: If the investigators need additional preparation, you might—

- Make sure they understand what the Word of Wisdom requires.
- Share any personal experiences you (or those you know) have had in living the Word of Wisdom.
- Emphasize that by living the Word of Wisdom, they can enjoy more fully the guidance of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost will testify of the truth and strengthen them in their preparations for baptism.
- Review the promises in D&C 89. Discuss ways these promises can bless us in our daily lives.
- Have them estimate how much money they spend on tobacco, alcohol, or other harmful substances.
- Read and discuss 1 Nephi 3:7. Assure them that God will help them keep the commandments if they exercise faith in him.

Follow Up: Discuss how you could help the investigators fulfill their commitment. For example, you could—

- Dispose of any tobacco, alcohol, or other substances for them, thus reducing temptation.
- Offer to visit them each day to offer support and encouragement.

DISCUSSION

TEACHING HELPS

- Arrange for members to make frequent contacts.
- Explain that you will be praying each morning and night that they will have the strength to keep their commitment.

SCRIPTURAL RESOURCES

Daniel 1:8-20 (Daniel resolved not to defile himself.)

1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20 (Your body is the temple of God. "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy.")

D&C 89 (The Lord reveals the Word of Wisdom.)

Topical Guide: Word of Wisdom

EXAMPLES

CONCLUSION

DISCUSSION

Additional Commitments

TEACHING HELPS

Baptism

Strengthen the investigators' commitment to be baptized on (date). Confirm their scheduled baptism date (or invite them to be baptized if you have not already done so). Discuss any further preparation that is needed and how you can help.

Taking Part in the Next Discussion

Make sure you obtain a firm commitment for the investigators to take part in the fifth discussion (usually within the next two to three days).

Reading and Praying

Help the investigators commit themselves to continue reading in the Book of Mormon and praying to know the truth of what they are learning. (The following reading assignment is suggested: Alma 11-13, 34; Helaman 14.) Also encourage them to continue reading the Book of Mormon from the beginning.

Attending Church Meetings

Confirm the investigators' plans to attend Church meetings. Invite them to attend if they have not already attended. Discuss how you can help them.

Referrals

As appropriate, help the investigators identify friends and relatives who could be invited to hear your message. As appropriate, use the "Referral Invitation" in the instruction booklet.

Study Guide

Use the study guide for this discussion to review the principles you have discussed and the commitments the investigators have made. Mark any scriptures to which you want to draw special attention. Fill out the information on the back of the study guide, including the date of your next appointment. Explain that you will be glad to answer any questions during your next visit.

Close with Prayer

By now the investigators should be willing to offer the prayer. Suggest that the family head ask one of them to pray. If necessary, use the "Instruction on Prayer" in the instruction booklet to reinforce the basic pattern of prayer.



THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

